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ABSTRACT

The paper describes a junior high school mentor program for gifted students. Noted among responsibilities of the coordinating teacher are finding a mentor to guide the student and arranging for the student's classes to be covered while he is away on field trips or in meetings. College students, nonpracticing teachers, hobbyists, and professional people are among the types of individuals recruited as mentors. Appended are an introductory letter to parents, criteria and priorities for High Potential Program selection, and general and specific admission forms. (SBH)

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MAINSTREAMING THE GIFTED

High Potential Program

Stewart Junior High
Talawanda Local School District
Oxford, Ohio

Ray Kley, Principal
Ann Fazzini, Teacher

Address to National Association of Secondary School Principals, Miami, Florida, January 1980

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The cornerstone of the philosophical base of the Stewart Junior High School High Potential program is a quotation from Goethe, "If you treat an individual as he is, he will stay as he is, but if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be."

We recognized a need to deal with the unusual potential of a significant number of our students. A program was developed to meet that need with no budget, no special facilities or materials, no clerical help, little staff time and little upper administration encouragement. What we did have was a supportive building principal--one who did not have to be sure the program would be a success before he gave it his backing--and a teaching staff committed to providing for the individual needs, interests and abilities of each student. Our program was not designed to gain public notice, generate publications, secure a grant of funds, or just do the presently popular thing in education.

The Talawanda School District is one of the largest in area in the state of Ohio, encompassing 145 square miles, with the widest possible variety of socio-economic backgrounds and academic abilities. The Junior High School is the first amalgamation of the students from five geographically separate districts.

Excellent programs for students who are potential drop-outs, vocationally oriented, learning disabled, and slow learners are provided in varying degrees in our school. Individual counselling is available to help these students assess their abilities and correct their deficiencies. The academic experience provides leveled classes with a master schedule that places each child in each subject according to his/her ability in that area. Able students have a more rigorous academic program with many enriching elements.

We believe that our district provides opportunity for students to grow in awareness, understanding and tolerance of others due to the wide diversity of our student population. An effort is made at Stewart to make all students feel they contribute as equal members of a democratic community regardless of their diversity and of any special attention directed toward their special needs. The ablest students should not, therefore, be segregated from the regular classroom schedule and extra-curricular activities or set apart in a way that would stratify our school community.

We are aware, however, that unless specialized opportunities are provided, the ablest students may not work to their full potential for social as well as educational reasons. It is not true that the gifted children will take care of themselves and always rise to the top. Sometimes these students find the usual classroom experience boring or frustrating because they have, in effect, been required to spend more hours than necessary on a task rather than having been encouraged to make the most efficient use of their time. This is costly to the students and to society because, not having been effectively employed, the students may become mediocre members of the group, rebels in the school, or dropouts in the community.

Able students are unusual in that they sense the significance of and solve problems in which others may not even be aware. They deal with concepts and ideas and produce creatively at advanced levels and should be encouraged to do so. They do not necessarily profit by simply doing more of the classroom activities or being provided with more physical resources.

Direction, refinement of skills, and interaction with models they can emulate develop the potential of the particularly gifted to go beyond the usual performance of their peers to high levels of abstraction and generalization (Martinson, Ruth A., The Identification of the Gifted and Talented). It is crucial, therefore, that we recognize the segment of our student body that has high potential in academic and creative areas and commit our resources to providing individuals in that group with their fair share of special support providing for them the same least restrictive education plan afforded under House Bill 455 for other special students.

Goals

1. To identify those students with high potential, ability or achievement in the academic or intellectual area.

2. To provide human resources for interaction with these students.

3. To arrange a resource room or center for guiding the activities of these students in the High Potential Program.

4. To stimulate each student to become self-directed in using his or her talents.

5. To aid each student to refine methods, develop new skills, investigate different approaches to solutions and to know the satisfaction of having stretched intellectually or creatively.

6. To foster in each student a sense of service to society and a dedication to use his or her talents in positive, productive ways.

MAINSTREAMING THE GIFTED

Address to National Association of Secondary School Principals, Miami, Florida, January, 1980

Ohio law says that a student must be educated in the least restrictive environment with an individual plan to develop his abilities and prepare him for adulthood. This charge is most often given to the teachers of the mentally and physically handicapped but it is equally applicable to the teachers of the mentally and physically advanced since those students share many of the same problems of social adjustment, inappropriate classwork, and inefficient use of their share of the tax dollar.

At Stewart Junior High our program to deal with this problem began, as they all do, with a committee. Teachers representing the various areas of study considered students who are finished when everyone else is still figuring out the directions, those who are really getting interested just as the unit ends, those who consistently seek out adult conversation, and those who pass the days and months in a state of genial boredom.

The committee acquired and studied proposals, reports, and curricula, and then, as every school must, came up with a plan to fit its own facilities, resources, and philosophy.

We decided that an honors class organization was inappropropriate because much of this advanced work is already provided by our ability grouping which includes the possibility of going over to the high school for part of the day and taking courses there. Besides, we did not want to further stratify our very diverse sutdent body. We wanted the gifted students to stay in the mainstream, studying and socializing with all the students but receiving some special attention just as other students do with reading or speech or study skills.

To begin identification of our group we searched the files. The federal guidelines for gifted programs define the group as students scoring in the 97th percentile of a standardized test. We used the ability section of the Ohio Survey Test which had been given in the sixth grade and included, in the initial screening, students who had scored from the 95th percentile up.

Individual IQ tests are recommended for identification but we have no budget or facilities for this. We considered group IQ tests but the educational psychologists with whom we consulted told us that the ability scores of the Ohio Survey Test correlate closely with the group IQ tests and our results would probably be nearly the same. We were advised to use a test of convergent and divergent thinking, in this case Consequences from Sheridan Psychological Services, to help identify gifted students who may not have shown up on the OST scores. We are conducting some experiments to test the validity of this particular instrument for this purpose and are looking for other possibilities.

We ask for teacher recommendations, an identification procedure which the literature considers of little value. However, our faculty is well-trained and perceptive, and we expect that their recommendations will prove to be fairly accurate.

When planning gifted programs, in-service training is essential since these gifted students are not necessarily those who do the neatest work or are the most competitive. With some training the classroom teachers will be alert for the different behaviors which may signal giftedness and will be able to identify and nurture these students.

In order to avoid any suspicion of elitism and to ensure that that no possible candidate is overlooked, we place articles in the local papers describing the program and inviting self-nominations.

Through these means, we acquire a group of thirty-five to forty candidates for the program and talk to them about its purposes and procedures. We stress the fact that no grade will be given or record kept - that this is a program to provide them with an opportunity to explore their own interests and abilities and their reward will be that satisfaction which comes with doing something you really want to do. The students are asked to talk it over with their parents and decide together whether or not they wish to be considered for the final selection.

The final group of twenty meets and, with the teacher, draws up an outline for a project. We use a mentor system and the coordinating teacher's main function is to find a mentor who will

guide the student in his quest as Dr. Kimball is suggesting readings for Dave who is interested in military history and then will discuss with him the implications and effects of war on society.

The co-ordinating teacher aids both of them in whatever way they need whether it be making appointments, arranging released time, finding a meeting room, or arranging to get the student privileges at the university library or some other institution which would normally be closed to him so that he can use these resources in his study.

One of our most successful projects involved this mentor-student pair. We introduced them, they made their own appointments and schedules, and we never saw them again until the end of the year when they invited us to witness a demonstration of the computer program Rick had written. This project has become the most popular of our offerings and we currently have about twelve students, including three girls learning BASIC and FORTRAN at the university computer center.

College students are a good source of mentors. This young woman is setting up some field trips and lab work for a student who is interested in chemistry. She checks with the classroom teacher so that whenever possible she can plan activities which are related to the regular curriculum. Another college student is acting as a French tutor and meets with Brian once a week to teach some conversational French.

The community is a rich source of mentors from non-practicing teachers to hobbyists to professional people. Stan spent one night a week with Dr. McGrew, one of our local veterinarians, observing and questioning, and learning some of the chores.

Most important, we use our own staff as mentors. They are refreshed by working in unconventional ways and we want the students to understand that our teachers are quite capable of working with them - it is not necessary to import a special teacher.

Several students may be included on one field trip even though they are working on separate projects as in this trip to Hueston Woods Nature Center for students interested in paleontology, meteorology, and animal behavior. These trips not only provide them with opportunities to acquire information but also to socialize with other students who have similar abilities and interests.

When field trips or meetings are scheduled, the co-ordinating teacher assists by arranging to have the mentor's classes covered.

Our twenty-five minute daily meeting time is used as the students wish. Jodi is wokring on a project to make sound filmstrips for children, Kalinde is designing, with much advice, a solar house, several girls are learning shorthand for more efficient note-taking.

Some group activities have sprung into being - several students interested in science organized a discussion on uses of space technology. An autobridge game intrigued another group to

the point that they taught themselves to play bridge and now they have a running game going. And, of course, sometimes they have to use the time for plain old study.

Students generally work alone but sometimes a group forms as was the case when several boys, interested in architecture, decided to plan a vacation house for a site near town. In the course of their project, they talked to architects, studied plans, investigated the possibilities of using adobe in Ohio, and spent an afternoon tramping over the site. The house never got built but the boys spent a lot of time planning, researching, examining, and analyzing ideas, and making decisions, and that, after all, is the point of the program.

We must be facilitators, providing opportunities for these very able young people to extend their knowledge, to learn new skills, to observe and talk with specialists, to explore vocational possibilities, or perhaps just to have the time to really get into something good.

Appendix

1. Introductory letter to parents
2. Criteria and priorities for HPP selection
3. General and specific permission forms
4. Example of newspaper publicity

Stewart Junior High

To the parents of _____:

Stewart Junior High is presently forming a small group of students who demonstrate unusually high academic potential. The purpose of the group is to enable these students to develop this potential by working at a project of special interest to them, by taking their classroom work beyond the level being taught, or by improving and refining skills they will need in the future.

On the basis of the Ohio Survey Test scores (test administered in the sixth grade) and faculty recommendations, approximately forty eighth graders have been identified as candidates for such a group. Because of our limited facilities, however, it will be necessary to restrict this first group to twenty students. Therefore, further testing must be done, and selection will be made by a faculty committee after consideration of the various measures.

_____ has discussed this plan with faculty members and has been asked to discuss it with you. The testing will be done only with your mutual consent. When you have made your decision, poease return the form at the bottom of this letter.

If you wish to discuss the matter with Mrs. Auble or Mrs. Fazzini who are working on this project, please call us at 523-5310.

Sincerely,

Ray Kley, Principal

Detach and return to Mrs. Fazzini.

___ We wish to proceed with further testing with the understanding that it may not be possible to include _____ in the group this year.

___ We do not wish to proceed with further testing.

Parent _____

Student _____

Criteria and Priorities for HPP Selection

A group of 20 will be selected in the following order:

1. Students exhibiting I.Q. scores of 130 or above.
2. Students with three OST ability of scores of 97 or above.
3. Students with two OST ability scores of 97 or above.
4. Students with one OST ability score of 97 or above.
5. Students with highest total OST ability scores who do not fit in 1, 2, and 3 above.
6. Exception: A student whose OST scores are in the lower range but has achieved a Consequences score in the upper range will be considered for selection after consultation with faculty and examination of all available material related to his ability.

GENERAL

To the Parents of Students in High Potential Projects:

As the students begin working, it may be necessary or desirable for them to leave the school for some phase of the work. Since it is necessary for the school to have parental permission, we would like for you to choose one of the options below and return it with your signature for our files.

If you have any questions, please call Mrs. Auble or Mrs. Fazzini at Stewart School.

_____ (Student's name) may:

___ 1. leave the school grounds at any time with the written permission of the program teacher and after having signed out in the office.

___ 2. leave the school grounds only with written permission from the parents for that particular instance, written permission from the program teacher, and after having signed out in the office.

___ 3. leave the school grounds only in the company of a faculty member and under the conditions stated in #2.

___ 4. not leave the school grounds under any circumstances.

_____
(Parent's signature)

* *

SPECIFIC

Stewart Junior High
High Potential Program

_____, 19__

_____ has permission to be off school grounds on a special assignment from _____ to _____.

Raymond C. Kelly, Principal

_____, Teacher